

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

**OU\_170589**

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

Gift of  
YALE UNIVERSITY



With the aid of the  
ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

1949





## LORD WEARY'S CASTLE



# CASTLE

Robert Lowell



*T. Parke, 1946*

*New York*

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

*All rights reserved, including  
the right to reproduce this book  
or portions thereof in any form.*

[e·8·47]

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



To  
JEAN

Some of these poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Nation*, *Common Sense*, *Portfolio*, *Foreground*, *The Commonweal*, *Poetry*, *The Virginia Quarterly*, and in "Land of Unlikeness," published by the Cummington Press.

## Note

My title comes from an old ballad:

"It's Lambkin was a mason good  
As ever built wi' stane:  
He built Lord Wearie's castle  
But payment gat he nane . . ."

When I use the word *after* below the title of a poem, what follows is not a translation but an imitation which should be read as though it were an original English poem. The last line of "The Shako" is taken literally from a translation by C. F. McIntyre. "Our Lady of Walsingham" is an adaptation of several paragraphs from E. I. Watkin's *Catholic Art and Culture*. I hope that the source of "After the Surprising Conversions" will be recognized.

R. L.

## Contents

The Exile's Return	3
The Holy Innocents	4
Colloquy in Black Rock	5
Christmas in Black Rock	6
New Year's Day	7
The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket	8
The First Sunday in Lent	15
Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue	17
Buttercups	18
In Memory of Arthur Winslow	19
Winter in Dunbarton	23
Mary Winslow	25
Salem	26
Concord	27
Children of Light	28
Rebellion	29
At a Bible House	30
The Drunken Fisherman	31
The North Sea Undertaker's Complaint	33
Napoleon Crosses the Berezina	34
The Soldier	35

War	36
Charles the Fifth and the Peasant	37
The Shako	38
France	39
1790	40
Between the Porch and the Altar	41
To Peter Taylor on the Feast of the Epiphany	46
As a Plane Tree by the Water	47
The Crucifix	48
Dea Roma	49
The Ghost	50
In the Cage	53
At the Indian Killer's Grave	54
Mr. Edwards and the Spider	58
After the Surprising Conversions	60
The Slough of Despond	62
The Blind Leading the Blind	63
The Fens	64
The Death of the Sheriff	65
The Dead in Europe	68
Where the Rainbow Ends	69



Suscipe, Domine, munera pro tuorum commemoratione Sanctorum: ut, sicut illos passio gloriosos effecit; ita nos devotio reddat innocuos.





## The Exile's Return

THERE mounts in squalls a sort of rusty mire,  
Not ice, not snow, to leaguer the Hôtel  
De Ville, where braced pig-iron dragons grip  
The blizzard to their rigor mortis. A bell  
Grumbles when the reverberations strip  
The thatching from its spire,  
The search-guns click and spit and split up timber  
And nick the slate roofs on the Holstenwall  
Where torn-up tilestones crown the victor. Fall  
And winter, spring and summer, guns unlimber  
And lumber down the narrow gabled street  
Past your gray, sorry and ancestral house  
Where the dynamited walnut tree  
Shadows a squat, old, wind-torn gate and cows  
The Yankee commandant. You will not see  
Strutting children or meet  
The peg-leg and reproachful chancellor  
With a forget-me-not in his button-hole  
When the unseasoned liberators roll  
Into the Market Square, ground arms before  
The Rathaus; but already lily-stands  
Burgeon the risen Rhineland, and a rough  
Cathedral lifts its eye. Pleasant enough,  
*Voi ch'entrate*, and your life is in your hands.

## The Holy Innocents

LISTEN, the hay-bells tinkle as the cart  
Wavers on rubber tires along the tar  
And cindered ice below the burlap mill  
And ale-wife run. The oxen drool and start  
In wonder at the fenders of a car,  
And blunder hugely up St. Peter's hill.  
These are the undefiled by woman—their  
Sorrow is not the sorrow of this world:  
King Herod shrieking vengeance at the curled  
Up knees of Jesus choking in the air,

A king of speechless clods and infants. Still  
The world out-Herods Herod; and the year,  
The nineteen-hundred forty-fifth of grace,  
Lumbers with losses up the clinkered hill  
Of our purgation; and the oxen near  
The worn foundations of their resting-place,  
The holy manger where their bed is corn  
And holly torn for Christmas. If they die,  
As Jesus, in the harness, who will mourn?  
Lamb of the shepherds, Child, how still you lie.

## Colloquy in Black Rock

HERE the jack-hammer jabs into the ocean;  
My heart, you race and stagger and demand  
More blood-gangs for your nigger-brass percussions,  
Till I, the stunned machine of your devotion,  
Clanging upon this cymbal of a hand,  
Am rattled screw and footloose. All discussions

End in the mud-flat detritus of death.  
My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud  
Hungarian workmen give their blood  
For the martyre Stephen, who was stoned to death.

Black Mud, a name to conjure with: O mud  
For watermelons gutted to the crust,  
Mud for the mole-tide harbor, mud for mouse,  
Mud for the armored Diesel fishing tubs that thud  
A year and a day to wind and tide; the dust  
Is on this skipping heart that shakes my house,

House of our Savior who was hanged till death.  
My heart, beat faster, faster. In Black Mud  
Stephen the martyre was broken down to blood:  
Our ransom is the rubble of his death.

Christ walks on the black water. In Black Mud  
Darts the kingfisher. On Corpus Christi, heart,  
Over the drum-beat of St. Stephen's choir  
I hear him, *Stupor Mundi*, and the mud  
Flies from his hunching wings and beak—my heart,  
The blue kingfisher dives on you in fire.

## Christmas in Black Rock

CHRIST God's red shadow hangs upon the wall  
The dead leaf's echo on these hours  
Whose burden spindles to no breath at all;  
Hard at our heels the huntress moonlight towers  
And the green needles bristle at the glass  
Tiers of defense-plants where the treadmill night  
Churns up Long Island Sound with piston-fist.  
Tonight, my child, the lifeless leaves will mass,  
Heaving and heaping, as the swivelled light  
Burns on the bell-spar in the fruitless mist.

Christ Child, your lips are lean and evergreen  
Tonight in Black Rock, and the moon  
Sidles outside into the needle-screen  
And strikes the hand that feeds you with a spoon  
Tonight, as drunken Polish night-shifts walk  
Over the causeway and their juke-box booms  
*Hosannah in excelsis Domino.*  
Tonight, my child, the foot-loose hallows stalk  
Us down in the blind alleys of our rooms;  
By the mined root the leaves will overflow.

December, old leech, has leafed through Autumn's store  
Where Poland has unleashed its dogs  
To bay the moon upon the Black Rock shore:  
Under our windows, on the rotten logs  
The moonbeam, bobbing like an apple, snags  
The undertow. O Christ, the spiralling years  
Slither with child and manger to a ball  
Of ice; and what is man? We tear our rags  
To hang the Furies by their itching ears,  
And the green needles nail us to the wall.

## New Year's Day

AGAIN and then again . . . the year is born  
To ice and death, and it will never do  
To skulk behind storm-windows by the stove  
To hear the postgirl sounding her French horn  
When the thin tidal ice is wearing through.  
Here is the understanding not to love  
Our neighbor, or tomorrow that will sieve  
Our resolutions. While we live, we live

To snuff the smoke of victims. In the snow  
The kitten heaved its hindlegs, as if fouled,  
And died. We bent it in a Christmas box  
And scattered blazing weeds to scare the crow  
Until the snake-tailed sea-winds coughed and howled  
For alms outside the church whose double locks  
Wait for St. Peter, the distorted key.  
Under St. Peter's bell the parish sea

Swells with its smelt into the burlap shack  
Where Joseph plucks his hand-lines like a harp,  
And hears the fearful *Puer natus est*  
Of Circumcision, and relives the wrack  
And howls of Jesus whom he holds. How sharp  
The burden of the Law before the beast:  
Time and the grindstone and the knife of God.  
The Child is born in blood, O child of blood.

# The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket

(FOR WARREN WINSLOW, DEAD AT SEA)

*Let man have dominion over the fishes of the sea and the fowls of the air and the beasts and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth.*

## I

A BRACKISH reach of shoal off Madaket,—  
The sea was still breaking violently and night  
Had steamed into our North Atlantic Fleet,  
When the drowned sailor clutched the drag-net. Light  
Flashed from his matted head and marble feet,  
He grappled at the net  
With the coiled, hurdling muscles of his thighs:  
The corpse was bloodless, a botch of reds and whites,  
Its open, staring eyes  
Were lustreless dead-lights  
Or cabin-windows on a stranded hulk  
Heavy with sand. We weight the body, close  
Its eyes and heave it seaward whence it came,  
Where the heel-headed dogfish barks its nose  
On Ahab's void and forehead; and the name  
Is blocked in yellow chalk.  
Sailors, who pitch this portent at the sea  
Where dreadnaughts shall confess  
Its hell-bent deity,  
When you are powerless  
To sand-bag this Atlantic bulwark, faced  
By the earth-shaker, green, unwearied, chaste  
In his steel scales: ask for no Orphean lute  
To pluck life back. The guns of the steeled fleet  
Recoil and then repeat  
The hoarse salute.

WHENEVER winds are moving and their breath  
Heaves at the roped-in bulwarks of this pier,  
The terns and sea-gulls tremble at your death  
In these home waters. Sailor, can you hear  
The Pequod's sea wings, beating landward, fall  
Headlong and break on our Atlantic wall  
Off 'Sconset, where the yawing S-boats splash  
The bellbuoy, with ballooning spinnakers,  
As the entangled, screeching mainsheet clears  
The blocks: off Madaket, where lubbers lash  
The heavy surf and throw their long lead squids  
For blue-fish? Sea-gulls blink their heavy lids  
Seaward. The winds' wings beat upon the stones,  
Cousin, and scream for you and the claws rush  
At the sea's throat and wring it in the slush  
Of this old Quaker graveyard where the bones  
Cry out in the long night for the hurt beast  
Bobbing by Ahab's whaleboats in the East.

### III

ALL you recovered from Poseidon died  
With you, my cousin, and the harrowed brine  
Is fruitless on the blue beard of the god,  
Stretching beyond us to the castles in Spain,  
Nantucket's westward haven. To Cape Cod  
Guns, cradled on the tide,  
Blast the eelgrass about a waterclock  
Of bilge and backwash, roil the salt and sand  
Lashing earth's scaffold, rock  
Our warships in the hand  
Of the great God, where time's contrition blues  
Whatever it was these Quaker sailors lost  
In the mad scramble of their lives. They died  
When time was open-eyed,  
Wooden and childish; only bones abide  
There, in the nowhere, where their boats were tossed  
Sky-high, where mariners had fabled news  
Of IS, the whited monster. What it cost  
Them is their secret. In the sperm-whale's slick  
I see the Quakers drown and hear their cry:  
"If God himself had not been on our side,  
If God himself had not been on our side,  
When the Atlantic rose against us, why,  
Then it had swallowed us up quick."



#### IV

THIS is the end of the whaleroad and the whale  
Who spewed Nantucket bones on the thrashed swell  
And stirred the troubled waters to whirlpools  
To send the Pequod packing off to hell:  
This is the end of them, three-quarters fools,  
Snatching at straws to sail  
Seaward and seaward on the turntail whale,  
Spouting out blood and water as it rolls,  
Sick as a dog to these Atlantic shoals:  
*Clamavimus*, O depths. Let the sea-gulls wail

For water, for the deep where the high tide  
Mutters to its hurt self, mutters and ebbs.  
Waves wallow in their wash, go out and out,  
Leave only the death-rattle of the crabs,  
The beach increasing, its enormous snout  
Sucking the ocean's side.  
This is the end of running on the waves;  
We are poured out like water. Who will dance  
The mast-lashed master of Leviathans  
Up from this field of Quakers in their unstoned graves?

WHEN the whale's viscera go and the roll  
 Of its corruption overruns this world  
 Beyond tree-swept Nantucket and Wood's Hole  
 And Martha's Vineyard, Sailor, will your sword  
 Whistle and fall and sink into the fat?  
 In the great ash-pit of Jehoshaphat  
 The bones cry for the blood of the white whale,  
 The fat flukes arch and whack about its ears,  
 The death-lance churns into the sanctuary, tears  
 The gun-blue swingle, heaving like a flail,  
 And hacks the coiling life out: it works and drags  
 And rips the sperm-whale's midriff into rags,  
 Gobbets of blubber spill to wind and weather,  
 Sailor, and gulls go round the stoven timbers  
 Where the morning stars sing out together  
 And thunder shakes the white surf and dismembers  
 The red flag hammered in the mast-head. Hide,  
 Our steel, Jonas Messias, in Thy side.

## OUR LADY OF WALSINGHAM

THERE once the penitents took off their shoes  
 And then walked barefoot the remaining mile;  
 And the small trees, a stream and hedgerows file  
 Slowly along the munching English lane,  
 Like cows to the old shrine, until you lose  
 Track of your dragging pain.  
 The stream flows down under the druid tree,  
 Shiloah's whirlpools gurgle and make glad  
 The castle of God. Sailor, you were glad  
 And whistled Sion by that stream. But see:

Our Lady, too small for her canopy,  
 Sits near the altar. There's no comeliness  
 At all or charm in that expressionless  
 Face with its heavy eyelids. As before,  
 This face, for centuries a memory,  
*Non est species, neque decor,*  
 Expressionless, expresses God: it goes  
 Past castled Sion. She knows what God knows,  
 Not Calvary's Cross nor crib at Bethlehem  
 Now, and the world shall come to Walsingham.

## VII

THE EMPTY winds are creaking and the oak  
Splatters and splatters on the cenotaph,  
The boughs are trembling and a gaff  
Bobs on the untimely stroke  
Of the greased wash exploding on a shoal-bell  
In the old mouth of the Atlantic. It's well;  
Atlantic, you are fouled with the blue sailors,  
Sea-monsters, upward angel, downward fish:  
Unmarried and corroding, spare of flesh  
Mart once of supercilious, wing'd clippers,  
Atlantic, where your bell-trap guts its spoil  
You could cut the brackish winds with a knife  
Here in Nantucket, and cast up the time  
When the Lord God formed man from the sea's slime  
And breathed into his face the breath of life,  
And blue-lung'd combers lumbered to the kill.  
The Lord survives the rainbow of His will.

# The First Sunday in Lent

## I

### *IN THE ATTIC*

THE CROOKED family chestnut sighs, for March,  
Time's fool, is storming up and down the town;  
The gray snow squelches and the well-born stamp  
From sermons in a scolded, sober mob  
That wears away the Sabbath with a frown,  
A world below my window. What will clamp  
The weak-kneed roots together when the damp  
Aches like a conscience, and they grope to rob  
The hero under his triumphal arch?

This is the fifth floor attic where I hid  
My stolen agates and the cannister  
Preserved from Bunker Hill—feathers and guns,  
Matchlock and flintlock and percussion-cap;  
Gettysburg etched upon the cylinder  
Of Father's Colt. A Luger of a Hun,  
Once blue as Satan, breaks Napoleon,  
My china pitcher. Cartridge boxes trap  
A chipmunk on the saber where they slid.

On Troy's last day, alas, the populous  
Shrines held carnival, and girls and boys  
Flung garlands to the wooden horse; so we  
Burrow into the lion's mouth to die.  
Lord, from the lust and dust thy will destroys  
Raise an unblemished Adam who will see  
The limbs of the tormented chestnut tree  
Tingle, and hear the March-winds lift and cry:  
"The Lord of Hosts will overshadow us."

*THE FERRIS WHEEL*

THIS world, this ferris wheel, is tired and strains  
Its townsman's humorous and bulging eye,  
As he ascends and lurches from his seat  
And dangles by a shoe-string overhead  
To tell the racing world that it must die.  
Who can remember what his father said?  
The little wheel is turning on the great  
In the white water of Christ's blood. The red  
Eagle of Ares swings along the lanes,

Of camp-stools where the many watch the sky:  
The townsman hangs, the eagle swings. It stoops  
And lifts the ferris wheel into the tent  
Pitched for the devil. But the man works loose,  
He drags and zigzags through the circus hoops,  
And lion-taming Satan bows and loops  
His cracking tail into a hangman's noose;  
He is the only happy man in Lent.  
He laughs into my face until I cry.

## Christmas Eve Under Hooker's Statue

TONIGHT a blackout. Twenty years ago  
I hung my stocking on the tree, and hell's  
Serpent entwined the apple in the toe  
To sting the child with knowledge. Hooker's heels  
Kicking at nothing in the shifting snow,  
A cannon and a cairn of cannon balls  
Rusting before the blackened Statehouse, know  
How the long horn of plenty broke like glass  
In Hooker's gauntlets. Once I came from Mass;

Now storm-clouds shelter Christmas, once again  
Mars meets his fruitless star with open arms,  
His heavy saber flashes with the rime,  
The war-god's bronzed and empty forehead forms  
Anonymous machinery from raw men;  
The cannon on the Common cannot stun  
The blundering butcher as he rides on Time—  
The barrel clinks with holly. I am cold:  
I ask for bread, my father gives me mould;

His stocking is full of stones. Santa in red  
Is crowned with wizened berries. Man of war,  
Where is the summer's garden? In its bed  
The ancient speckled serpent will appear,  
And black-eyed susan with her frizzled head.  
When Chancellorsville mowed down the volunteer,  
"All wars are boyish," Herman Melville said;  
But we are old, our fields are running wild:  
Till Christ again turn wanderer and child.

## Buttercups

WHEN we were children our papas were stout  
And colorless as seaweed or the floats  
At anchor off New Bedford. We were shut  
In gardens where our brassy sailor coats  
Made us like black-eyed susans bending out  
Into the ocean. Then my teeth were cut:  
A levelled broom-pole butt  
Was pushed into my thin  
And up-turned chin—  
There were shod hoofs behind the horseplay. But  
I played Napoleon in my attic cell  
Until my shouldered broom  
Bobbed down the room  
With horse and neighing shell.

Recall the shadows the doll-curtains veined  
On Ancrem Winslow's ponderous plate from blue  
China, the breaking of time's haggard tide  
On the huge cobwebbed print of Waterloo,  
With a cracked smile across the glass. I cried  
To see the Emperor's sabered eagle slide  
From the clutching grenadier  
Staff-officer  
With the gold leaf cascading down his side—  
A red dragoon, his plough-horse rearing, swayed  
Back on his reins to crop  
The buttercup  
Bursting upon the braid.



# In Memory of Arthur Winslow

## I

### DEATH FROM CANCER

THIS Easter, Arthur Winslow, less than dead,  
Your people set you up in Phillips' House  
To settle off your wrestling with the crab—  
The claws drop flesh upon your yachting blouse  
Until longshoreman Charon come and stab  
Through your adjusted bed  
And crush the crab. On Boston Basin, shells  
Hit water by the Union Boat Club wharf:  
You ponder why the coxes' squeakings dwarf  
The *resurrexit dominus* of all the bells.

Grandfather Winslow, look, the swanboats coast  
That island in the Public Gardens, where  
The bread-stuffed ducks are brooding, where with tub  
And strainer the mid-Sunday Irish scare  
The sun-struck shallows for the dusky chub  
This Easter, and the ghost  
Of risen Jesus walks the waves to run  
Arthur upon a trumpeting black swan  
Beyond Charles River to the Acheron  
Where the wide waters and their voyager are one.

## II

### *DUNBARTON*

THE STONES are yellow and the grass is gray  
Past Concord by the rotten lake and hill  
Where crutch and trumpet meet the limousine  
And half-forgotten Starks and Winslows fill  
The granite plot and the dwarf pines are green  
From watching for the day  
When the great year of the little yeomen come  
Bringing its landed Promise and the faith  
That made the Pilgrim Makers take a lathe  
And point their wooden steeples lest the Word be dumb.

O fearful witnesses, your day is done:  
The minister from Boston waves your shades,  
Like children, out of sight and out of mind.  
The first selectman of Dunbarton spreads  
Wreaths of New Hampshire pine cones on the lined  
Casket where the cold sun  
Is melting. But, at last, the end is reached;  
We start our cars. The preacher's mouthings still  
Deafen my poor relations on the hill:  
Their sunken landmarks echo what our fathers preached.

### III

#### *FIVE YEARS LATER*

THIS Easter, Arthur Winslow, five years gone  
I came to mourn you, not to praise the craft  
That netted you a million dollars, late  
Hosing out gold in Colorado's waste,  
Then lost it all in Boston real estate.  
Now from the train, at dawn  
Leaving Columbus in Ohio, shell  
On shell of our stark culture strikes the sun  
To fill my head with all our fathers won  
When Cotton Mather wrestled with the fiends from hell.

You must have hankered for our family's craft:  
The block-house Edward made, the Governor,  
At Marshfield, and the slight coin-silver spoons  
The Sheriff beat to shame the gaunt Revere,  
And General Stark's coarse bas-relief in bronze  
Set on your granite shaft  
In rough Dunbarton; for what else could bring  
You, Arthur, to the veined and alien West  
But devil's notions that your gold at least  
Could give back life to men who whipped or backed the King?

#### IV

### A PRAYER FOR MY GRANDFATHER TO OUR LADY

MOTHER, for these three hundred years or more  
Neither our clippers nor our slavers reached  
The haven of your peace in this Bay State:  
Neither my father nor his father. Beached  
On these dry flats of fishy real estate,  
O Mother, I implore  
Your scorched, blue thunderbreasts of love to pour  
Buckets of blessings on my burning head  
Until I rise like Lazarus from the dead:  
*Lavabis nos et super nivem dealbabor.*

"On Copley Square, I saw you hold the door  
To Trinity, the costly Church, and saw  
The painted Paradise of harps and lutes  
Sink like Atlantis in the Devil's jaw  
And knock the Devil's teeth out by the roots;  
But when I strike for shore  
I find no painted idols to adore:  
Hell is burned out, heaven's harp-strings are slack.  
Mother, run to the chalice, and bring back  
Blood on your finger-tips for Lazarus who was poor."

## Winter in Dunbarton

TIME smiling on this sundial of a world  
Sweltered about the snowman and the worm,  
Sacker of painted idols and the peers  
Of Europe; but my cat is cold, is curled  
Tight as a boulder: she no longer smears  
Her catnip mouse from Christmas, for the germ—  
Mindless and ice, a world against our world—  
Has tamped her round of brains into her ears.

This winter all the snowmen turn to stone,  
Or, sick of the long hurly-burly, rise  
Like butterflies into Jehovah's eyes  
And shift until their crystals must atone

In water. Belle, the cat that used to rat  
About my father's books, is dead. All day  
The wastes of snow about my house stare in  
Through idle windows at the brainless cat;  
The coke-barrel in the corner whimpers. May  
The snow recede and red clay furrows set  
In the grim grin of their erosion, in  
The caterpillar tents and roadslides, fat

With muck and winter dropsy, where the tall  
Snow-monster wipes the coke-fumes from his eyes  
And scatters his corruption and it lies  
Gaping until the fungus-eyeballs fall

Into this eldest of the seasons. Cold  
Snaps the bronze toes and fingers of the Christ  
My father fetched from Florence, and the dead  
Chatters to nothing in the thankless ground  
His father screwed from Charlie Stark and sold  
To the selectmen. Cold has cramped his head  
Against his heart: my father's stone is crowned  
With snowflakes and the bronze-age shards of Christ.

## Mary Winslow

HER IRISH maids could never spoon out mush  
Or orange-juice enough; the body cools  
And smiles as a sick child  
Who adds up figures, and a hush  
Grips at the poised relations sipping sherry  
And tracking up the carpets of her four  
Room kingdom. On the rigid Charles, in snow,  
Charon, the Lubber, clambers from his wherry,  
And stops her hideous baby-squawks and yells,  
Wit's clownish afterthought. Nothing will go  
Again. Even the gelded picador  
Baiting the twinned runt bulls  
With walrus horns before the Spanish Belles  
Is veiled with all the childish bibelots.

Mary Winslow is dead. Out on the Charles  
The shells hold water and their oarblades drag,  
Littered with captivated ducks, and now  
The bell-rope in King's Chapel Tower unsnarls  
And bells the bestial cow  
From Boston Common; she is dead. But stop,  
Neighbor, these pillows prop  
Her that her terrified and child's cold eyes  
Glass what they're not: our Copley ancestress,  
Grandiloquent, square-jowled and worldly-wise,  
A Cleopatra in her housewife's dress;  
Nothing will go again. The bells cry: "Come,  
Come home," the babbling Chapel belfry cries:  
"Come, Mary Winslow, come; I bell thee home."

## Salem

IN SALEM seasick spindrift drifts or skips  
To the canvas flapping on the seaward panes  
Until the knitting sailor stabs at ships  
Nosing like sheep of Morpheus through his brain's  
Asylum. Seaman, seaman, how the draft  
Lashes the oily slick about your head,  
Beating up whitecaps! Seaman, Charon's raft  
Dumps its damned goods into the harbor-bed,—  
There sewage sickens the rebellious seas.  
Remember, seaman, Salem fishermen  
Once hung their nimble fleets on the Great Banks.  
Where was it that New England bred the men  
Who quartered the Leviathan's fat flanks  
And fought the British Lion to his knees?



## Concord

TEN THOUSAND Fords are idle here in search  
Of a tradition. Over these dry sticks—  
The Minute Man, the Irish Catholics,  
The ruined bridge and Walden's fished-out perch—  
The belfry of the Unitarian Church  
Rings out the hanging Jesus. Crucifix,  
How can your whited spindling arms transfix  
Mammon's unbridled industry, the lurch  
For forms to harness Heraclitus' stream!  
This Church is Concord—Concord where Thoreau  
Named all the birds without a gun to probe  
Through darkness to the painted man and bow:  
The death-dance of King Philip and his scream  
Whose echo girdled this imperfect globe.

## Children of Light

OUR FATHERS wrung their bread from stocks and stones  
And fenced their gardens with the Redman's bones;  
Embarking from the Nether Land of Holland,  
Pilgrims unhouseled by Geneva's night,  
They planted here the Serpent's seeds of light;  
And here the pivoting searchlights probe to shock  
The riotous glass houses built on rock,  
And candles gutter by an empty altar,  
And light is where the landless blood of Cain  
Is burning, burning the unburied grain.

## Rebellion

THERE was rebellion, father, when the mock  
French windows slammed and you hove backward, rammed  
Into your heirlooms, screens, a glass-cased clock,  
The highboy quaking to its toes. You damned  
My arm that cast your house upon your head  
And broke the chimney flintlock on your skull.  
Last night the moon was full:  
I dreamed the dead  
Caught at my knees and fell:  
And it was well  
With me, my father. Then  
Behemoth and Leviathan  
Devoured our mighty merchants. None could arm  
Or put to sea. O father, on my farm  
I added field to field  
And I have sealed  
An everlasting pact  
With Dives to contract  
The world that spreads in pain;  
But the world spread  
When the clubbed flintlock broke my father's brain.

## At a Bible House

At a Bible House  
Where smoking is forbidden  
By the Prophet's law,  
I saw you wiry, bed-ridden,  
Gone in the kidneys; raw  
Onions and a louse  
Twitched on the sheet before  
The palsy of your white  
Stubble—a Mennonite  
Or die-hard Doukabor,  
God-rooted, hard. You spoke  
Whistling gristle-words  
Half inaudible  
To us: of raw-boned birds  
Migrating from the smoke  
Of cities, of a gull  
Perched on the redwood  
Thrusting short awl-shaped leaves:  
Three hundred feet of love  
Where the Pacific heaves  
The tap-root—wise above  
Man's wisdom with the food  
Squeezed from three thousand years'  
Standing. It is all  
A moment. The trees  
Grow earthward: neither good  
Nor evil, hopes nor fears,  
Repulsion nor desire,  
Earth, water, air or fire  
Will serve to stay the fall.

\*

## The Drunken Fisherman

WALLOWING in this bloody sty,  
I cast for fish that pleased my eye  
(Truly Jehovah's bow suspends  
No pots of gold to weight its ends);  
Only the blood-mouthed rainbow trout  
Rose to my bait. They flopped about  
My canvas creel until the moth  
Corrupted its unstable cloth.

A calendar to tell the day;  
A handkerchief to wave away  
The gnats; a couch unstuffed with storm  
Pouching a bottle in one arm;  
A whiskey bottle full of worms;  
And bedroom slacks: are these fit terms  
To mete the worm whose molten rage  
Boils in the belly of old age?

Once fishing was a rabbit's foot—  
O wind blow cold, O wind blow hot,  
Let suns stay in or suns step out:  
Life danced a jig on the sperm-whale's spout—  
The fisher's fluent and obscene  
Catches kept his conscience clean.  
Children, the raging memory drools  
Over the glory of past pools.

Now the hot river, ebbing, hauls  
Its bloody waters into holes;  
A grain of sand inside my shoe  
Mimics the moon that might undo  
Man and Creation too; remorse,  
Stinking, has puddled up its source;  
Here tantrums thrash to a whale's rage.  
This is the pot-hole of old age.

Is there no way to cast my hook  
Out of this dynamited brook?  
The Fisher's sons must cast about  
When shallow waters peter out.  
I will catch Christ with a greased worm,  
And when the Prince of Darkness stalks  
My bloodstream to its Stygian term . . .  
On water the Man-Fisher walks.

## The North Sea Undertaker's Complaint

Now south and south and south the mallard heads,  
His green-blue bony hood echoes the green  
Flats of the Weser, and the mussel beds  
Are sluggish where the webbed feet spanked the lean  
Eel grass to tinder in the take-off. South  
Is what I think of. It seems yesterday  
I slid my hearse across the river mouth  
And pitched the first iced mouse into the hay.  
Thirty below it is. I hear our dumb  
Club-footed orphan ring the Angelus  
And clank the bell-chain for St. Gertrude's choir  
To wail with the dead bell the martyrdom  
Of one more blue-lipped priest; the phosphorous  
Melted the hammer of his heart to fire.

## Napoleon Crosses the Berezina

*"There will the eagles be gathered together"*

HERE Charlemagne's stunted shadow plays charades  
With pawns and bishops whose play-cannister  
Shivers the Snowman's bones, and the Great Bear  
Shuffles away to his ancestral shades,  
For here Napoleon Bonaparte parades;  
Hussar and cuirassier and grenadier  
Ascend the tombstone steppes to Russia. Here  
The eagles gather as the West invades  
The Holy Land of Russia. Lord and glory  
Of dragonish, unfathomed waters, rise!  
Although your Berezina cannot gnaw  
These soldier-plumed pontoons to matchwood, ice  
Is tuning them to tumbrils, and the snow  
Blazes its carrion-miles to Purgatory.



## The Soldier

IN TIME of war you could not save your skin.  
Where is that Ghibelline whom Dante met  
On Purgatory's doorstep, without kin  
To set up chantries for his God-held debt?  
So far from Campaldino, no one knows  
Where he is buried by the Archiano  
Whose source is Camaldoli, through the snows,  
*Fuggendo a piedi e sanguinando il piano,*  
The soldier drowned face downward in his blood.  
Until the thaw he waited, then the flood  
Roared like a wounded dragon over shoal  
And reef and snatched away his crucifix  
And rolled his body like a log to Styx;  
Two angels fought with bill-hooks for his soul.

# War

(AFTER RIMBAUD)

WHERE basilisk and mortar lob their lead  
Whistling against the cloud sheep overhead,  
Scarlet or green, before their black-tongued Sire,  
The massed battalions flounder into fire  
Until the furnace of affliction turns  
A hundred thousand men to stone and burns  
The poor dead in the summer grass. Their friend,  
The earth, was low and thrifty to this end:  
It is a god untouched by papal bulls,  
The great gold chalice and the thuribles:  
Cradled on its hosannahs, it will rock,  
Dead to the world, until their mother, fat  
With weeping underneath her cracked black hat,  
Hands it her penny knotted in a sock.

## Charles the Fifth and the Peasant

(AFTER VALÉRY)

ELECTED Kaiser, burgher and a knight,  
Clamped in his black and burly harness, Charles  
Canter on Titian's sunset to his night;  
A wounded wolfhound bites his spurs and snarls:  
So middle-aged and common, it's absurd  
To picture him as Caesar, the first cause  
Behind whose leg-of-mutton beard, the jaws  
Grate on the flesh and gristle of the Word.

The fir trees in the background buzz and lurch  
To the disgruntled sing-song of their fears:  
"How can we stop it, stop it, stop it?" sing  
The needles; and the peasant, braining perch  
Against a bucket, rocks and never hears  
His Ark drown in the deluge of the King.

## The Shako

(AFTER RILKE)

NIGHT and its muffled creakings, as the wheels  
Of Blücher's caissons circle with the clock;  
He lifts his eyes and drums until he feels  
The clavier shudder and allows the rock  
And Scylla of her eyes to fix his face:  
It is as though he looks into a glass  
Reflecting on this guilty breathing-space  
His terror and the salvos of the brass  
From Brandenburg. She moves away. Instead,  
Wearily by the broken altar, Abel  
Remembers how the brothers fell apart  
And hears the friendless hacking of his heart,  
And strangely foreign on the mirror-table  
Leans the black shako with its white death's-head.

## France

(FROM THE GIBBET)

MY HUMAN brothers who live after me,  
See how I hang. My bones eat through the skin  
And flesh they carried here upon the chin  
And lipping clutch of their cupidity;  
Now here, now there, the starling and the sea  
Gull splinter the groined eyeballs of my sin,  
Brothers, more beaks of birds than needles in  
The fathoms of the Bayeux Tapestry:  
"God wills it, wills it, wills it: it is blood."  
My brothers, if I call you brothers, see:  
The blood of Abel crying from the dead  
Sticks to my blackened skull and eyes. What good  
Are *lebensraum* and bread to Abel dead  
And rotten on the cross-beams of the tree?

ON MAUNDY THURSDAY when the King and Queen  
Had washed and wiped the chosen poor and fed  
Them from a boisterous wooden platter; here  
We stood in forage-caps upon the green:  
Green guardsmen of the Nation and its head.  
The King walked out into the biting air,  
Two gentlemen went with him; as they neared  
Our middle gate, we stood aside for welcome;  
A stone's throw lay between us when they cleared  
Two horse-shoe flights of steps and crossed the Place Vendome.

"What a dog's life it is to be a king,"  
I grumbled and unslung my gun; the chaff  
And cinders whipped me and began to sting.  
I heard our Monarch's Breughel-peasant laugh  
Exploding, as a spaniel mucked with tar  
Cut by his Highness' ankles on the double-quick  
To fetch its stamping mistress. Louis smashed  
Its backbone with a backstroke of his stick:  
Slouching a little more than usual, he splashed  
As boyish as a stallion to the Champs de Mars.

# Between the Porch and the Altar

## I

### MOTHER AND SON

MEETING his mother makes him lose ten years,  
Or is it twenty? Time, no doubt, has ears  
That listen to the swallowed serpent, wound  
Into its bowels, but he thinks no sound  
Is possible before her, he thinks the past  
Is settled. It is honest to hold fast  
Merely to what one sees with one's own eyes  
When the red velvet curves and haunches rise  
To blot him from the pretty driftwood fire's  
Façade of welcome. Then the son retires  
Into the sack and selfhood of the boy  
Who clawed through fallen houses of his Troy,  
Homely and human only when the flames  
Crackle in recollection. Nothing shames  
Him more than this uncoiling, counterfeit  
Body presented as an idol. It  
Is something in a circus, big as life,  
The painted dragon, a mother and a wife  
With flat glass eyes pushed at him on a stick;  
The human mover crawls to make them click,  
The forehead of her father's portrait peels  
With rosy dryness, and the schoolboy kneels  
To ask the benediction of the hand,  
Lifted as though to motion him to stand,  
Dangling its watch-chain on the Holy Book—  
A little golden snake that mouths a hook.

## ADAM AND EVE

THE FARMER sizzles on his shaft all day.  
He is content and centuries away  
From white-hot Concord, and he stands on guard.  
Or is he melting down like sculptured lard?  
His hand is crisp and steady on the plough.  
I quarrelled with you, but am happy now  
To while away my life for your unrest  
Of terror. Never to have lived is best;  
Man tasted Eve with death. I taste my wife  
And children while I hold your hands. I knife  
Their names into this elm. What is exempt?  
I eye the statue with an awed contempt  
And see the puritanical façade  
Of the white church that Irish exiles made  
For Patrick—that Colonial from Rome  
Had magicked the charmed serpents from their home,  
As though he were the Piper. Will his breath  
Scorch the red dragon of my nerves to death?  
By sundown we are on a shore. You walk  
A little way before me and I talk,  
Half to myself and half aloud. They lied,  
My cold-eyed seedy fathers when they died,  
Or rather threw their lives away, to fix  
Sterile, forbidding nameplates on the bricks  
Above a kettle. Jesus rest their souls!  
You cry for help. Your market-basket rolls  
With all its baking apples in the lake.  
You watch the whorish slither of a snake  
That chokes a duckling. When we try to kiss,  
Our eyes are slits and cringing, and we hiss;  
Scales glitter on our bodies as we fall.  
The Farmer melts upon his pedestal.



*KATHERINE'S DREAM*

It must have been a Friday. I could hear  
The top-floor typist's thunder and the beer  
That you had brought in cases hurt my head;  
I'd sent the pillows flying from my bed,  
I hugged my knees together and I gasped.  
The dangling telephone receiver rasped  
Like someone in a dream who cannot stop  
For breath or logic till his victim drop  
To darkness and the sheets. I must have slept,  
But still could hear my father who had kept  
Your guilty presents but cut off my hair.  
He whispers that he really doesn't care  
If I am your kept woman all my life,  
Or ruin your two children and your wife;  
But my dishonor makes him drink. Of course  
I'll tell the court the truth for his divorce.  
I walk through snow into St. Patrick's yard.  
Black nuns with glasses smile and stand on guard  
Before a bulkhead in a bank of snow,  
Whose charred doors open, as good people go  
Inside by twos to the confessor. One  
Must have a friend to enter there, but none  
Is friendless in this crowd, and the nuns smile.  
I stand aside and marvel; for a while  
The winter sun is pleasant and it warms  
My heart with love for others, but the swarms  
Of penitents have dwindled. I begin  
To cry and ask God's pardon of our sin.

Where are you? You were with me and are gone.  
All the forgiven couples hurry on  
To dinner and their nights, and none will stop.  
I run about in circles till I drop  
Against a padlocked bulkhead in a yard  
Where faces redden and the snow is hard.

## IV

## AT THE ALTAR

I sit at a gold table with my girl  
Whose eyelids burn with brandy. What a whirl  
Of Easter eggs is colored by the lights,  
As the Norwegian dancer's crystallized thighs  
Flash with her naked leg's high-booted skate,  
Like Northern Lights upon my watching plate.  
The twinkling steel above me is a star;  
I am a fallen Christmas tree. Our car  
Races through seven red-lights—then the road  
Is unpatrolled and empty, and a load  
Of ply-wood with a tail-light makes us slow.  
I turn and whisper in her ear. You know  
I want to leave my mother and my wife,  
You wouldn't have me tied to them for life . . .  
Time runs, the windshield runs with stars. The past  
Is cities from a train, until at last  
Its escalating and black-windowed blocks  
Recoil against a Gothic church. The clocks  
Are tolling. I am dying. The shocked stones  
Are falling like a ton of bricks and bones  
That snap and splinter and descend in glass  
Before a priest who mumbles through his Mass  
And sprinkles holy water; and the Day  
Breaks with its lightning on the man of clay,  
*Dies amara valde.* Here the Lord  
Is Lucifer in harness: hand on sword,  
He watches me for Mother, and will turn  
The bier and baby-carriage where I burn.

## To Peter Taylor on the Feast of the Epiphany

PETER, the war has taught me to revere  
The rulers of this darkness, for I fear  
That only Armageddon will suffice  
To turn the hero skating on thin ice  
When Whore and Beast and Dragon rise for air  
From allegoric waters. Fear is where  
We hunger: where the Irishmen recall  
How wisdom trailed a star into a stall  
And knelt in sacred terror to confer  
Its fabulous gold and frankincense and myrrh:  
And where the lantern-noses scrimmage down  
The highway to the sea below this town  
And the sharp barker rigs his pre-war planes  
To lift old Adam's dollars for his pains;  
There on the thawing ice, in red and white  
And blue, the bugs are buzzing for the flight.  
December's daylight hours have gone their round  
Of sorrows with the sun into the sound,  
And still the grandsires battle through the slush  
To storm the landing biplanes with a rush—  
Until their cash and somersaulting snare  
Fear with its fingered stop-watch in mid-air.

## As a Plane Tree by the Water

DARKNESS has called to darkness, and disgrace  
Elbows about our windows in this planned  
Babel of Boston where our money talks  
And multiplies the darkness of a land  
Of preparation where the Virgin walks  
And roses spiral her enamelled face  
Or fall to splinters on unwatered streets.  
Our Lady of Babylon, go by, go by,  
I was once the apple of your eye;  
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

The flies, the flies, the flies of Babylon  
Buzz in my ear-drums while the devil's long  
Dirge of the people detonates the hour  
For floating cities where his golden tongue  
Enchants the masons of the Babel Tower  
To raise tomorrow's city to the sun  
That never sets upon these hell-fire streets  
Of Boston, where the sunlight is a sword  
Striking at the withholder of the Lord:  
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

Flies strike the miraculous waters of the iced  
Atlantic and the eyes of Bernadette  
Who saw Our Lady standing in the cave  
At Massabielle, saw her so squarely that  
Her vision put out reason's eyes. The grave  
Is open-mouthed and swallowed up in Christ.  
O walls of Jericho! And all the streets  
To our Atlantic wall are singing: "Sing,  
Sing for the resurrection of the King."  
Flies, flies are on the plane tree, on the streets.

## The Crucifix

How DRY time screams in its fat axle-grease,  
As spare November strikes us through the ice  
And the Leviathan breaks water in the rice  
Fields, at the poles, at the hot gates to Greece;  
It's time: the old unmastered lion roars  
And ramps like a mad dog outside the doors,  
Snapping at gobbets in my thumbless hand.  
The seaways lurch through Sodom's knees of sand  
Tomorrow. We are sinking. "Run, rat, run,"  
The prophets thunder, and I run upon  
My father, Adam. Adam, if our land  
Become the desolation of a hand  
That shakes the Temple back to clay, how can  
War ever change my old into new man?  
Get out from under my feet, old man. Let me pass;  
On Ninth Street, through the Hallowe'en's soaped glass,  
I picked at an old bone on two crossed sticks  
And found, to *Via et Vita et Veritas*  
A stray dog's signpost is a crucifix.

## Dea Roma

AUGUSTUS mended you. He hung the tongue  
Of Tullius upon your rostrum, lashed  
The money-lenders from your Senate-house;  
And Brutus bled his forty-six per cent  
For *Pax Romana*. Quiet as a mouse  
Blood licks the king's cosmetics with its tongue.

Some years, your legions soldiered through this world  
Under the eagles of Lord Lucifer;  
But human torches lit the captains home  
Where victims warped the royal crucifix:  
How many roads and sewers led to Rome.  
Satan is pacing up and down the world

These sixteen centuries, Eternal City,  
That we have squandered since Maxentius fell  
Under the Milvian Bridge; from the dry dome  
Of Michelangelo, your fisherman  
Walks on the waters of a draining Rome  
To bank his catch in the Celestial City.

# The Ghost

(AFTER SEXTUS PROPERTIUS)

A GHOST is someone: death has left a hole  
For the lead-colored soul to beat the fire:  
Cynthia leaves her dirty pyre  
And seems to coil herself and roll  
Under my canopy,  
Love's stale and public playground, where I lie  
And fill the run-down empire of my bed.  
I see the street, her potter's field, is red  
And lively with the ashes of the dead;

But she no longer sparkles off in smoke:  
It is the body carted to the gate  
Last Friday, when the sizzling grate  
Left its charred furrows on her smock  
And ate into her hip.  
A black nail dangles from a finger-tip  
And Lethe oozes from her nether lip.  
Her thumb-bones rattle on her brittle hands,  
As Cynthia stamps and hisses and demands:

"Sextus, has sleep already washed away  
Your manhood? You forget the window-sill  
My sliding wore to slivers? Day  
Would break before the Seven Hills  
Saw Cynthia retreat  
And climb your shoulders to the knotted sheet.  
You shouldered me and galloped on bare feet  
To lay me by the crossroads. Have no fear:  
Notus, who snatched your promise, has no ear.



"But why did no one call in my deaf ear?  
Your calling would have gained me one more day.

Sextus, although you ran away

You might have called and stopped my bier

A second by your door.

No tears drenched a black toga for your whore  
When broken tilestones bruised her face before  
The Capitol. Would it have strained your purse  
To scatter ten cheap roses on my hearse?

"The State will make Pompilia's Chloris burn:

I knew her secret when I kissed the skull

Of Pluto in the tainted bowl.

Let Nomas burn her books and turn

Her poisons into gold;

The finger-prints upon the potsherd told

Her love. You let a slut, whose body sold

To Thracians, liquefy my golden bust

In the coarse flame that crinkled me to dust.

"If Chloris' bed has left you with your head,

Lover, I think you'll answer my arrears:

My nurse is getting on in years,

See that she gets a little bread—

She never clutched your purse;

See that my little humpback hears no curse

From her close-fisted friend. But burn the verse

You bellowed half a lifetime in my name:

Why should you feed me to the fires of fame?

"I will not hound you, much as you have earned  
It, Sextus: I shall reign in your four books—

I swear this by the Hag who looks  
Into my heart where it was burned:

Propertius, I kept faith;

If not, may serpents suck my ghost to death  
And spit it with their forked and killing breath  
Into the Styx where Agamemnon's wife  
Founders in the green circles of her life.

"Beat the sycophant ivy from my urn,  
That twists its binding shoots about my bones

Where apple-sweetened Anio drones  
Through orchards that will never burn

While honest Herakles,

My patron, watches. Anio, you will please

Me if you whisper upon sliding knees:

'Propertius, Cynthia is here:

She shakes her blossoms when my waters clear.'

"You cannot turn your back upon a dream,  
For phantoms have their reasons when they come:

We wander midnights: then the numb

Ghost wades from the Lethean stream;

Even the foolish dog

Stops its hell-raising mouths and casts its clog;

At cock-crow Charon checks us in his log.

Others can have you, Sextus; I alone

Hold: and I grind your manhood bone on bone."

## In the Cage

THE LIFERS file into the hall,  
According to their houses—twos  
Of laundered denim. On the wall  
A colored fairy tinkles blues  
And titters by the balustrade;  
Canaries beat their bars and scream.  
We come from tunnels where the spade  
Pick-axe and hod for plaster steam  
In mud and insulation. Here  
The Bible-twisting Israelite  
Fasts for his Harlem. It is night,  
And it is vanity, and age  
Blackens the heart of Adam. Fear,  
The yellow chirper, beaks its cage.

## At the Indian Killer's Grave

*"Here, also, are the veterans of King Philip's War,  
who burned villages and slaughtered young and old,  
with pious fierceness, while the godly souls through-  
out the land were helping them with prayer."*

HAWTHORNE.

BEHIND King's Chapel what the earth has kept  
Whole from the jerking noose of time extends  
Its dark enigma to Jehoshaphat;  
Or will King Philip plait  
The just man's scalp in the wailing valley! Friends,  
Blacker than these black stones the subway bends  
About the dirty elm roots and the well  
For the unchristened infants in the waste  
Of the great garden rotten to its root;  
Death, the engraver, puts forward his bone foot  
And Grace-with-wings and Time-on-wings compel  
All this antique abandon of the disgraced  
To face Jehovah's buffets and his ends.

The dusty leaves and frizzled lilacs gear  
This garden of the elders with baroque  
And prodigal embellishments but smoke,  
Settling upon the pilgrims and their grounds,  
Espouses and confounds  
Their dust with the off-scourings of the town;  
The libertarian crown  
Of England built their mausoleum. Here  
A clutter of Bible and weeping willows guards  
The stern Colonial magistrates and wards  
Of Charles the Second, and the clouds  
Weep on the just and unjust as they will,—  
For the poor dead cannot see Easter crowds  
On Boston Common or the Beacon Hill  
Where strangers hold the golden Statehouse dome  
For good and always. Where they live is home:  
A common with an iron railing: here  
Frayed cables wreath the spreading cenotaph  
Of John and Mary Winslow and the laugh  
Of Death is hacked in sandstone, in their year.

A green train grinds along its buried tracks  
And screeches. When the great mutation racks  
The Pilgrim Fathers' relics, will these plaques  
Harness the spare-ribbed persons of the dead  
To battle with the dragon? Philip's head  
Grins on the platter, fouls in pantomime  
The fingers of kept time:  
"Surely, this people is but grass,"  
He whispers, "this will pass;  
But, Sirs, the trollop dances on your skulls  
And breaks the hollow noddle like an egg  
That thought the world an eggshell. Sirs, the gulls  
Scream from the squelching wharf-piles, beg a leg  
To crack their crops. The Judgment is at hand;  
Only the dead are poorer in this world  
Where State and elders thundered *raca*, hurled  
Anathemas at nature and the land  
That fed the hunter's gashed and green perfection—  
Its settled mass concedes no outlets for your puns  
And verbal Paradises. Your election,  
Hawking above this slime  
For souls as single as their skeletons,  
Flutters and claws in the dead hand of time."

When you go down this man-hole to the drains,  
The doorman barricades you in and out;  
You wait upon his pleasure. All about  
The pale, sand-colored, treeless chains  
Of T-squared buildings strain  
To curb the spreading of the braced terrain;  
When you go down this hole, perhaps your pains  
Will be rewarded well; no rough-cast house  
Will bed and board you in King's Chapel. Here  
A public servant putters with a knife  
And paints the railing red  
Forever, as a mouse  
Cracks walnuts by the headstones of the dead  
Whose chiselled angels peer  
At you, as if their art were long as life.

I ponder on the railing at this park:  
Who was the man who sowed the dragon's teeth,  
That fabulous or fancied patriarch  
Who sowed so ill for his descent, beneath  
King's Chapel in this underworld and dark?  
John, Matthew, Luke and Mark,  
Gospel me to the Garden, let me come  
Where Mary twists the warlock with her flowers—  
Her soul a bridal chamber fresh with flowers  
And her whole body an ecstatic womb,  
As through the trellis peers the sudden Bridegroom.

## Mr. Edwards and the Spider

I saw the spiders marching through the air,  
Swimming from tree to tree that mildewed day  
In latter August when the hay  
Came creaking to the barn. But where  
The wind is westerly,  
Where gnarled November makes the spiders fly  
Into the apparitions of the sky,  
They purpose nothing but their ease and die  
Urgently beating east to sunrise and the sea;

What are we in the hands of the great God?  
It was in vain you set up thorn and briar  
In battle array against the fire  
And treason crackling in your blood;  
For the wild thorns grow tame  
And will do nothing to oppose the flame;  
Your lacerations tell the losing game  
You play against a sickness past your cure.  
How will the hands be strong? How will the heart endure?

A very little thing, a little worm,  
Or hourglass-blazoned spider, it is said,  
Can kill a tiger. Will the dead  
Hold up his mirror and affirm  
To the four winds the smell  
And flash of his authority? It's well  
If God who holds you to the pit of hell,  
Much as one holds a spider, will destroy,  
Baffle and dissipate your soul. As a small boy



On Windsor Marsh, I saw the spider die  
When thrown into the bowels of fierce fire:  
    There's no long struggle, no desire  
    To get up on its feet and fly—  
    It stretches out its feet  
And dies. This is the sinner's last retreat;  
Yes, and no strength exerted on the heat  
Then sinews the abolished will, when sick  
And full of burning, it will whistle on a brick.

But who can plumb the sinking of that soul?  
Josiah Hawley, picture yourself cast  
    Into a brick-kiln where the blast  
    Fans your quick vitals to a coal—  
    If measured by a glass,  
How long would it seem burning! Let there pass  
• A minute, ten, ten trillion; but the blaze  
Is infinite, eternal: this is death,  
To die and know it. This is the Black Widow, death.

## After the Surprising Conversions

*September twenty-second*, Sir: today  
I answer. In the latter part of May,  
Hard on our Lord's Ascension, it began  
To be more sensible. A gentleman  
Of more than common understanding, strict  
In morals, pious in behavior, kicked  
Against our goad. A man of some renown,  
An useful, honored person in the town,  
He came of melancholy parents; prone  
To secret spells, for years they kept alone—  
His uncle, I believe, was killed of it:  
Good people, but of too much or little wit.  
I preached one Sabbath on a text from Kings;  
He showed concernment for his soul. Some things  
In his experience were hopeful. He  
Would sit and watch the wind knocking a tree  
And praise this countryside our Lord has made.  
Once when a poor man's heifer died, he laid  
A shilling on the doorsill; though a thirst  
For loving shook him like a snake, he durst  
Not entertain much hope of his estate  
In heaven. Once we saw him sitting late  
Behind his attic window by a light  
That guttered on his Bible; through that night  
He meditated terror, and he seemed  
Beyond advice or reason, for he dreamed  
That he was called to trumpet Judgment Day  
To Concord. In the latter part of May  
He cut his throat. And though the coroner  
Judged him delirious, soon a noisome stir

Palsied our village. At Jehovah's nod  
Satan seemed more let loose amongst us: God  
Abandoned us to Satan, and he pressed  
Us hard, until we thought we could not rest  
Till we had done with life. Content was gone.  
All the good work was quashed. We were undone.  
The breath of God had carried out a planned  
And sensible withdrawal from this land;  
The multitude, once unconcerned with doubt,  
Once neither callous, curious nor devout,  
Jumped at broad noon, as though some peddler groaned  
At it in its familiar twang: "My friend,  
Cut your own throat. Cut your own throat. Now! Now!"  
September twenty-second, Sir, the bough  
Cracks with the unpicked apples, and at dawn  
The small-mouth bass breaks water, gorged with spawn.

## The Slough of Despond

AT SUNSET only swamp  
Afforded purse-puffs of grass . . . these gave,  
I sank. Each humus-swallowed pool  
Rattled its cynic's lamp  
And croaked: "We lay Apollo in his grave;  
Narcissus is our fool."

My God, it was a slow  
And brutal push! At last I struck the tree  
Whose dead and purple arms, entwined  
With sterile thorns, said: "Go!  
Pluck me up by the roots and shoulder me;  
The watchman's eyes are blind."

My arms swung like an axe.  
And with my tingling sword I lopped the knot:  
The labyrinthine East was mine  
But for the asking. Lax  
And limp, the creepers caught me by the foot,  
And then I toed their line;

I walk upon the flood:  
My way is wayward; there is no way out:  
Now how the weary waters swell,—  
The tree is down in blood!  
All the bats of Babel flap about  
The rising sun of hell.

## The Blind Leading the Blind

NOTHING will hustle: at his own sweet time  
My father and his before him humanized  
The seedy fields and heaped them on my house  
Of straw; no flaring, hurtling thing surprised  
Us out of season, and the corn-fed mouse  
Reined in his bestial passions. Hildesheim  
Survived the passing angel; who'd require  
Our passion for the Easter? Satan snored  
By the brass railing, while his back-log roared  
And coiled its vapors on St. Gertrude's blue stone spire:

A land of mattocks; here the brothers strode,  
Hulking as horses in their worsted hose  
And cloaks and shin-guards—each had hooked his hoe  
Upon his fellow's shoulder; by each nose  
The aimless waterlines of eyeballs show  
Their greenness. They are blind—blind to the road  
And to its Maker. Here my father saw  
The leadman trip against a pigpen, crash,  
Legs spread, his codpiece split, his fiddle smash . . .  
'These mammoth vintners danced their blood out in the straw.

# The Fens

(AFTER COBBETT)

FROM Crowland to St. Edmund's to Ipswich  
The fens are level as a drawing-board:  
Great bowling greens divided by a ditch—  
The grass as thick as grows on ground. The Lord  
High Sheriff settles here, as on a sea,  
When the parochial calm of sunset chills  
The world to its four corners. And the hills  
Are green with hops and harvest, and a bitch  
Spuddles about a vineyard on a tree;

Here everything grows well. Here the fat land  
Has no stone bigger than a ladybug,  
No milkweed or wild onion can withstand  
The sheriff's men, and sunlight sweats the slug.  
Here the rack-renting system has its say:  
At nightfall sheep as fat as hogs shall lie  
Heaped on the mast and corncobs of the sty  
And they will rise and take the landlord's hand;  
The bailiff bears the Bell, the Bell, away.

# The Death of the Sheriff

*"forsitan et Priami fuerint quae fata, requiras?"*

## I

### NOLI ME TANGERE

WE PARK and stare. A full sky of the stars  
Wheels from the pumpkin setting of the moon  
And sparks the windows of the yellow farm  
Where the red-flannelled madmen look through bars  
At windmills thrashing snowflakes by an arm  
Of the Atlantic. Soon  
The undertaker who collects antiques  
Will let his motor idle at the door  
And set his pine-box on the parlor floor.  
Our homicidal sheriff howled for weeks;

We kiss. The State had reasons: on the whole,  
It acted out of kindness when it locked  
Its servant in this place and had him watched  
Until an ordered darkness left his soul  
A *tabula rasa*; when the Angel knocked  
The sheriff laid his notched  
Revolver on the table for the guest.  
Night draws us closer in its bearskin wrap  
And our loved sightless smother feels the tap  
Of the blind stars descending to the west

To lay the Devil in the pit our hands  
Are draining like a windmill. Who'll atone  
For the unsearchable quicksilver heart  
Where spiders stare their eyes out at their own  
Spitting and knotted likeness? We must start:  
Our aunt, his mother, stands  
Singing *O Rock of Ages*, as the light  
Wanderers show a man with a white cane  
Who comes to take the coffin in his wain,  
The thirsty Dipper on the arc of night.

\*



## II

### THE PORTRAIT

THE WHISKEY circulates, until I smash  
 The candelabrum from the mantel's top,  
 And scorch Poseidon on the panel where  
 He forks the blocks of Troy into the air.  
 A chipmunk shucks the strychnine in a cup;  
 The popping pine-cones flash  
 Like shore-bait on his face in oils. My bile  
 Rises, and beads of perspiration swell  
 To flies and splash the *Parmachenie Belle*  
 That I am scraping with my uncle's file.

I try the barb upon a pencilled line  
 Of Vergil. Nothing underneath the sun  
 Has bettered, Uncle, since the scaffolds flamed  
 On butchered Troy until Aeneas shamed  
 White Helen on her hams by Vesta's shrine . . .  
 All that the Greeks have won  
 I'll cancel with a sidestroke of my sword;  
 Now I can let my father, wife and son  
 Banquet Apollo for Laomedon:  
 Helen will satiate the fire, my Lord.

I search the starlight . . . Helen will appear,  
*Pura per noctem in luce* . . . I am chilled,  
 I drop the barbless fly into my purse  
 Beside his nickel shield. It is God's curse,  
 God's, that has purpled Lucifer with fear  
 And burning. God has willed;  
 I lift the window. Digging has begun,  
 The hill road sparkles, and the mourners' cars  
 Wheel with the whited sepulchres of stars  
 To light the worldly dead-march of the sun.

## The Dead in Europe

AFTER the planes unloaded, we fell down  
Buried together, unmarried men and women;  
Not crown of thorns, not iron, not Lombard crown,  
Not griled and spindle spires pointing to heaven  
Could save us. Raise us, Mother, we fell down  
Here hugger-mugger in the jellied fire:  
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Our Mother, shall we rise on Mary's day  
In Maryland, wherever corpses married  
Under the rubble, bundled together? Pray  
For us whom the blockbusters marred and buried;  
When Satan scatters us on Rising-day,  
O Mother, snatch our bodies from the fire:  
Our sacred earth in our day was our curse.

Mother, my bones are trembling and I hear  
The earth's reverberations and the trumpet  
Bleating into my shambles. Shall I bear,  
(O Mary!) unmarried man and powder-puppet,  
Witness to the Devil? Mary, hear,  
O Mary, marry earth, sea, air and fire;  
Our sacred earth in our day is our curse.

## Where the Rainbow Ends

I saw the sky descending, black and white,  
Not blue, on Boston where the winters wore  
The skulls to jack-o'-lanterns on the slates,  
And Hunger's skin-and-bone retrievers tore  
The chickadee and shrike. The thorn tree waits  
Its victim and tonight  
The worms will eat the deadwood to the foot  
Of Ararat: the scythers, Time and Death,  
Helméd locusts, move upon the tree of breath;  
The wild ingrafted olive and the root

Are withered, and a winter drifts to where  
The Pepperpot, ironic rainbow, spans  
Charles River and its scales of scorched-earth miles.  
I saw my city in the Scales, the pans  
Of judgment rising and descending. Piles  
Of dead leaves char the air—  
And I am a red arrow on this graph  
Of Revelations. Every dove is sold  
The Chapel's sharp-shinned eagle shifts its hold  
On serpent-Time, the rainbow's epitaph.

In Boston serpents whistle at the cold.  
The victim climbs the altar steps and sings:  
"Hosannah to the lion, lamb, and beast  
Who fans the furnace-face of IS with wings:  
I breathe the ether of my marriage feast."  
At the high altar, gold  
And a fair cloth. I kneel and the wings beat  
My cheek. What can the dove of Jesus give  
You now but wisdom, exile? Stand and live,  
The dove has brought an olive branch to eat.















